



Michigan Counseling Association

To: Michigan House of Representatives Education Committee
Fr: Michigan Counseling Association

Michigan Counseling Association Statement Regarding HB 5040

The Michigan Counseling Association (MCA) is the organization that represents professional counselors who work with clients in public and private agencies, schools and colleges and private practice throughout the state of Michigan. MCA strongly opposes HB 5040 because of the extremely damaging effects that it will have on the university programs that train professional counselors, students who aspire to become counselors, and members of the public who need counseling services.

If enacted, this bill will allow students in counseling, psychology, and social work programs to refuse to see clients – based on the client's race, sex, or national origin, among other protected traits – as long as they claim deeply held religious or moral convictions. In allowing such discrimination, professional training programs would be violating a cornerstone of the American Counseling Association's (ACA) Code of Ethics. The ACA Code of Ethics, Section C.5, states "Counselors do not condone or engage in discrimination based on age, culture, disability, ethnicity, race, religion/ spirituality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status/partnership, language preference, socioeconomic status, or any basis proscribed by law."

Cultural competency is a foundation of the ACA Code of Ethics and of the curricular requirements for professional counselor education. In order to work effectively with clients, counseling students must learn to work with clients who are different from them. The expectation that students behave in accordance with the ACA Code of Ethics is a curricular requirement for any program that seeks accreditation by CACREP (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Educational Programs), the national accrediting body for counseling programs. If HB 5040 is enacted, the public and private Michigan universities that currently have CACREP-accredited counseling programs (EMU, WMU, Wayne, Oakland, University of Detroit Mercy, Andrews) risk losing their accreditation because they will be required to condone discrimination. Other programs that may desire to become accredited will not be eligible to do so.

In adopting the CACREP standards as the model for program approval, the Michigan Counselor Licensure Law (Michigan Public Health Code, Part 181, Counseling) also adopts the ACA Code of Ethics. If this bill is enacted, graduates of Michigan's counseling programs will not be eligible for jobs in the Federal VA system, where graduation from a CACREP-accredited program is required for applicants with counseling degrees. Clients in Michigan who are

military veterans and use Tricare insurance will no longer have access to professional counselors since a degree from a CACREP-accredited program will become a requirement for these providers after 2014. Thus, not only will Michigan's universities lose their accreditation and have great difficulty attracting students, but those that do graduate from Michigan's programs will be restricted in obtaining employment.

This proposed legislation gives counseling students the right to determine their own curricular requirements based solely on their religious or moral convictions. Is it not each individual school's right to define the curriculum, based on the standards of the profession? The curricular requirement that counseling students learn to work with clients regardless of their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and so on is essential to the training of professional counselors. The Michigan Counseling Association urges you to defeat this bill so that the profession can define its curricular requirements and maintain the highest standards for the training of professional counselors.